

# Daily News

October 10, 2014

## Growing a brighter future

***Horticulture program at prison holds potential for success outside.***

Editor's note: Graham Milldrum of the Daily News staff and Kelly Monroe of our sister newspaper, the Daily Record in Lawrenceville, recently had a rare opportunity to visit Robinson Correctional Center. This is the second of a series of stories based on that visit.



By GRAHAM MILLDRUM  
Daily News

Growing things are not normally associated with the concrete floors, iron bars and wire fences of a prison.

*Inmate James Hinderliter, 42, waters the mums he and other inmates at the Robinson Correctional Center were growing as part of the horticulture program. Some were donated to Lincoln Trail College and others were used by the Illinois Department of Transportation for rest areas. (Kelly Monroe photo)*

But in a small area of the Robinson Correctional Center, trees rise and flowers bloom under the care of inmates in the horticulture program.

Taught by Pamela Murphy, the program aims to teach inmates skills useful on the outside.

Assistant Warden Dee Dee Brookhart is the director for education. She said students who go through this class could become landscape designers, lawn-care business owners or do similar jobs.

Participant Tonu Hurey said he had never raised or planted much of anything before the course. "All I did was mow some grass at home," he said.

He worked in construction before his sentencing in 2006, and sees the training in this program as a way to save money once he's released. Instead of hiring someone to do the work, Hurey could do it himself.

That's a similar motivation for James Hinderliter, who also worked in construction.

The training will allow him to serve as worker, supervisor or both.

It also helps calm him down. He said he has "somewhat of an anger problem," which has gotten him into trouble before.

He said the wages for managerial roles in landscape work is also an attraction. While he said he often saw landscapers at work, he wasn't aware of how much they made.

But he discovered an old wage book from the Bureau of Labor Statistics showing how much someone could make in various occupations. He and Stephen Pyle, 28, reviewed the decade-old book, and they expect those wages to climb even higher.

According to the 2014 wage statistics, landscape architects in Illinois have a median wage of \$68,570. Construction workers have a median wage of \$47,840.

Pyle said he'd like to work with landscapes and horticulture for a living. If that's not possible, he would like to start a garden.

He said it's pretty much brand-new to him, as he had little experience with the work involved.

Now he'd like to have his own landscaping business.

One of the program's current projects is raising flowers for planting at Illinois Department of Transportation rest stops.

In addition to beautification, the efforts highlight cost-saving efforts by the departments, said Illinois Department of Corrections Director of Communication Tom Shaer. IDOT provides the cuttings and then DOC grows them. The plants are then distributed around the state.

The group recently sent out complete planters developed by the inmates.

That was the first project that Pyle completed with the program. He said it gave him a "good feeling" to know they are helping at the state sites.

The funding from IDOT has also made it possible to add a greenhouse to their current three. There they continue to cultivate plants throughout the year.

"Sometimes we get to eat a tomato from the greenhouse," Hinderliter said. "That's not something everyone gets to do."